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ABSTRACT

Directors of 100 undergraduate training programs in speech language pathology and audiology were surveyed about the readability level and faculty satisfaction with currently used textbooks. For each of seven fundamental courses, Ss were asked to indicate the academic level at which students typically completed the courses, the textbook currently used in the course, and the degree of faculty satisfaction with the text. The most preferred textbook(s), by course, were analyzed for predicted readability using the Fog Index. Results showed that for over half of the preferred textbooks, predicted readability exceeded mean student level by 1.4 to 4.1 years. The highest degree of faculty satisfaction was with texts having a predicted readability level which paralleled the typical student level. (CL)

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ANALYSIS OF PREFERRED TEXTBOOKS IN SPEECH-LANGUAGE PATHOLOGY AND AUDIOLOGY

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ANALYSIS OF PREFERRED TEXTBOOKS IN SPEECH-LANGUAGE PATHOLOGY AND AUDIOLOGY

An increasing number of textbooks in speech-language pathology and audiology are being published each year. Within the educational system, emphasis has been placed upon selection of instructional materials appropriate for the student's ability level. For these reasons, university faculty are facing an increasingly difficult task in the selection of an appropriate textbook.

Students at all levels of education learn most effectively when the difficulty of their textbooks does not exceed their reading level (Santa and Burstyn, 1977). However, a number of investigators have suggested university textbooks are written at a readability level which is too difficult for the targeted student (Cline, 1972; Gurtsen, 1977; Kurtzman, 1974; Major and Collette, 1961; Maury-Hess, Crancer, Brester, 1979; Santa and Burstyn, 1977). Furthermore, Santa and Burstyn (1977) suggested university faculty, tending to use textbooks with thorough coverage of their expanding disciplines, selected textbooks commensurate with their own reading abilities and intellectual sophistication.

The present study was limited to an investigation of textbooks used in university courses fundamental to the study of Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology. Specifically, answers were sought to two questions. What is the readability level of currently used textbooks in Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology? Are university faculty satisfied with the textbooks they are using?

METHOD

One hundred undergraduate training programs in Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology were randomly selected and surveyed. While it is acknowledged that Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology are frequently considered at

DEC 3 0 1980

least master's level professions, undergraduate programs were selected for the survey because introductory coursework is often completed at this level.

The director of each university program was mailed a questionnaire requesting information relative to seven fundamental courses. For each course, respondents were asked to indicate the academic level at which students typically completed the courses, textbook currently used in the course, and degree of faculty satisfaction with the textbook. The seven courses were: Introduction to Speech and Hearing, Anatomy and Physiology of Speech and Hearing, Speech Science, Phonetics, Introduction to Audiology, Speech and Language Development, and Aural Rehabilitation. A forty nine percent response rate was obtained.

The textbooks thus identified were rank ordered from most often to least often used. The most preferred textbook(s), by course, were analyzed for predicted readability using the Fog Index.

Numerous indexes are available for predicting readability level, e.g., Dale-Chall Readability Formula (Dale and Chall, 1948), Flesh Reading Ease Formula (Flesh, 1949), and the Fog Index (Gunning, 1952). The Fog Index was selected for use because of its ease of computation and because it provides a grade reading level directly. Gunning's (1952) procedures for computing the Fog Index were followed.

Mean scores were computed for the academic level at which students typically completed the coursework. Faculty satisfaction with the most frequently used textbooks was descriptively analyzed based upon a Likert-type scale rating.

RESULTS

For five courses, single textbooks were identified as being most frequently used across training programs. For the remaining two courses, training

programs responses indicated two different textbooks were being frequently used. As a result, readability analysis was conducted on nine textbooks. The mean student level for course completion, textbook readability level, faculty satisfaction with the textbook, and percentage of training programs using the textbook are presented by course in Table 1.

DISCUSSION

There are limitations in the study. First, the student's mean grade level does not necessarily reflect their ability to read at that level. Second, predicting the readability level of textbooks is subject to a valid number of criticisms both in terms of validity and reliability. Third, an a priori assumption was made that student's typically completed the course-work at the undergraduate level. This may or may not be accurate.

However, the purpose of the study was to investigate readability level of currently used textbooks and faculty satisfaction with those textbooks. For over half of the preferred textbooks, predicted readability exceeded mean student level by 1.4 to 4.1 years. This would tend to substantiate the findings of other investigators who have suggested that university textbooks were written at a level too difficult for the student. However, the findings relative to faculty satisfaction with the preferred textbooks were encouraging. The highest degree of faculty satisfaction was not with textbooks having the highest predicted readability levels but rather with textbooks having a predicted readability level which paralleled the typical student level. It is interesting to note that the highest faculty satisfaction ratings are with textbooks reflecting less than a .5 year discrepancy between mean student grade level and predicted textbook readability. Perhaps faculty do recognize the need for appropriate student level material but as yet have not identified, or found available, such textbooks.

Predicted readability level is only one measure for evaluating textbooks. Other factors certainly influence faculty selection of textbooks. However, utilization of readability analysis may be of assistance in faculty textbook selection in view of previous research and data presented.

SUMMARY

The predicted readability level for over half of the preferred textbooks currently used in fundamental courses in Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology exceeded typical student grade level by an average of two years. Faculty satisfaction was, however, greatest with textbooks with predicted readability levels which paralleled student grade level.

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TABLE 1

COURSE	MEAN STUDENT GRADE LEVEL	READABILITY GRADE LEVEL	PERCENTAGE OF FACULTY SATISFACTION			PERCENTAGE OF PROGRAMS USING TEXTBOOK
			DISSATISFIED	MODERATELY	VERY	
Introduction to Speech and Hearing	13.7	14.4	26	48	26	45
Anatomy and Physiology of Speech and Hearing	14.3	18.4	13	66	21	72
Speech Science	14.6	16.0	8	75	17	28
Phonetics	14.0	13.5	7	79	14	30
Introduction to Audiology	14.7	14.4	0	52	48	39
	15.0	17.5	11	72	17	35
Speech and Language Development	14.9	14.8	9	55	36	20
	15.0	17.5	20	50	30	18
Aural Rehabilitation	15.7	17.6	20	60	20	36